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Viewing cable 08PORTAUPRINCE1024, SENATOR YOURI LATORTUE ON HAITI'S POLITICAL IMPASSE

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#08PORTAUPRINCE1024.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08PORTAUPRINCE1024	2008-07-17 17:59	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Port Au Prince

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.haiti-liberte.com/archives/volume4-51/vendeur%20de%20drogue.asp>

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SUBJECT: SENATOR YOURI LATORTUE ON HAITI'S POLITICAL IMPASSE

REF: 07 PORT AU PRINCE 01138

PORT AU PR 00001024 001.4 OF 003

Classified By: Ambassador Janet Sanderson. Reason: E.O. 12958 1.4 (b) , (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) Senator Youri Latortue supports the current Prime Minister-designate but anticipates a tough fight over the confirmation of her cabinet and government program, which he believes should focus on bolstering internal security, domestic production, and local government. He puts the blame for the April food riots on Fanmi Lavalas elements, and says Prime Minister Alexis deserved to be ousted for failing to deliver on key social and economic promises. Latortue believes that besides the Haitian National Police, Haiti needs at least a gendarmerie, or better yet an army, to assure security along the maritime and land borders. He wants government efforts at boosting domestic production to focus on agriculture, particularly in his home region of the Artibonite. He sees President Preval scheming to amend the constitution to allow himself a third term. With a shady and possibly criminal past, Latortue is an unavoidable presence in the Senate, a key player in judicial reform and the confirmation of a new government, and a likely Presidential contender in 2011. End Summary.

Supports PM-Designate, But Will Press His Issues

¶2. (C) PolCouns on July 11 called on Senator Youri Latortue, first Senator from the Artibonite Department, who represents the party he founded, Artibonite in Action (LAAA). Latortue said he would vote to confirm Michele Pierre-Louis as Prime Minister. Reacting to controversy over allegations she is in a homosexual relationship, he said he had asked her directly whether she was living with another woman, and she replied, no, she lived in her own apartment. Latortue said that was enough for him, although he hoped she would say that publicly. (Note: Latortue has since affirmed his support for Pierre-Louis in public. End Note) He was fairly confident there was a majority of 10 Senators for the first stage of her confirmation process, in which both houses of Parliament vote on whether she satisfies constitutional eligibility requirements.

¶3. (C) He predicted however, that the subsequent vote on her cabinet and political program would be more difficult. For that, she will need 16 votes in the Senate. Latortue said that Senator Edmonde Supplice Beauzile is firmly determined to vote against Pierre Louis, seeing her as a political rival. (Note: Beauzile has since said in public she will either abstain or vote against Pierre-Louis. End Note) Senate President Bastien cannot vote except to break a tie. Thus all 16 remaining Senators must vote yes if her cabinet and program are to pass. (Note: twelve Senate seats are vacant, ten because elections for one-third of the Senate have not been held, one because of a death in office, and one Senator expelled for allegedly having dual nationality. The vote of confidence in a new Prime Minister's cabinet and policy declaration requires a majority of all Senators, whether their seats are filled nor not, i.e., 16 of 30. End Note).

¶4. (C) The Senator confided that he has told Pierre-Louis directly that, for him to support her on the later vote on her cabinet and government program, he wants her to address

'national production,' decentralization, and security. He is seeking only general agreement with the PM-designate on priorities, not a detailed policy outline or promises of specific projects. Although Latortue has stated publicly his support for reestablishing Haiti's army, he told PolCouns he is not seeking a commitment from the PM-designate to re-establish an army. He opposes deputies, demands for ministerial and other posts as a condition for ratification, as no government could ever satisfy all these demands.

Latortue's Role in April

¶15. (C) When PolCouns inquired about the origin of the April riots, Latortue blamed "certain elements" in Fanmi Lavalas for organizing the violence. He claimed that four people arrested in connection with those disorders were Fanmi Lavalas people. Asked why he marshaled his Senate colleagues into a vote to oust the government of Prime Minister Alexis, he claimed that Alexis had failed to deliver on his original program centered on increasing security, stimulating domestic production, and enacting social programs. He said Alexis had used the "Cooperative of Progressive Parliamentarians" (CPP - the informal majority bloc in the Chamber of Deputies) to block Preval's first two PM nominations. He accused Alexis of in effect bribing deputies with checks for school-reopening programs -- although the checks were handed out in April and school does not begin until September. Alexis also had failed to bring any improvements to his home department, the Artibonite. Latortue brushed aside PolCouns' reference to the widespread belief that he and Alexis are rivals based on competition for dominance in their home territory of Artibonite.

The Latortue Political Program

¶17. (C) Latortue outlined the three pillars of his political program: bolstering domestic security, stimulating domestic production, and strengthening local government. Latortue's security program centers on 1) expanding Haitian National Police (HNP) coverage of the country. Most HNP forces are now concentrated in the capital. He advocated 1) posting the next two HNP graduating classes in rural areas, which currently have virtually no police presence; 2) creating a coordinated national intelligence institution; and 3) establishing an army or a gendarmerie. Although he would prefer an army, when President Preval told him he preferred a gendarmerie, Latortue said that would be okay. The Senator thought a gendarmerie should be 3-5,000 strong, and that its primary task should be coastal and border security.

¶18. (C) Recalling that his home department of the Artibonite had once been Haiti's breadbasket, Latortue claimed that only 20,000 out of 80,000 hectares of arable land in that region now was cultivated. A generation ago, Haiti had produced 400,000 tons of rice annually and consumed 320,000, leaving 80,000 tons for export. Now, Haiti produced only 90,000 tons. Government help with credit and fertilizer could quickly up that figure to 200,000. The next government should take these easy steps.

¶19. (C) The Senator declared that he strongly supports decentralization. The central government should give municipalities the money they need at the beginning of every budget year to run their operations. Currently, they are fed money in intermittent dribbles throughout the year, which makes rational municipal management and budgeting impossible.

The Constitution, Presidential Ambitions

¶10. (C) Latortue says that he and many other politicians believe that Preval's motive for wanting to change the constitution is to allow him to run again. He claimed Preval asked him directly why he should not be allowed to run for a third term if he remained popular. The Senator was coy about

his own intentions on running in 2011. If people showed him their support, he said, he would run. If not, he would support someone else.

Comment

¶11. (C) Latortue is an unavoidable presence in the Senate and one of that body's most active members. He was the prime mover behind the April 12 Senate vote that brought down the government of PM Alexis. He has been an active collaborator on Senate efforts on judicial reform, a frequent interlocutor of President Preval, and in the vortex of the Senate debate on confirming the next Prime Minister. He could well be a formidable Presidential candidate in 2011, despite his professed lack of serious interest. Embassy nevertheless remains conscious of Latortue's shady past (which may well continue into the present) and of his possible drug associations. While Latortue is the most articulate and media-savvy of Senators, his messages to foreign diplomatic interlocutors are carefully tailored around his political agenda. Embassy will continue to maintain discreet, working level contact with Latortue in the interest of gathering information.

SANDERSON